

A Reply to Bill Norman And Others

By WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

In the national Discussion Bulletin No. 2 Comrade Bill Norman, misrepresenting my point of view on various questions, characterizes my general position as one of "moving backwards," and he says that, if adopted, it would "doom our Party to impotence." In view of this and similar attacks from comrades on the Right, I have requested space in the Bulletin to express my position concisely upon a number of pertinent questions now before us, in the general sense of what must be done to re-strengthen the C.P. U.S.A. and to overcome its crisis. Most basic of all to this end, our Party must stand firmly upon the elementary principles of Marxism-Leninism, adapting them skillfully to American conditions. In nearly 40 years of political experience in this country Marxism-Leninism (despite the various mistakes which, not surprisingly, we have made in its application) has demonstrated effectiveness of the Communist itself in the greater growth and Party—to be incomparably better fitted to the American class struggle than any of the several brands of Social Democracy practiced by other American Left wing groups. This is the rock bottom test of reality. Our cue, therefore, is not to abandon Marxism-Leninism, as the Rights are trying to have us do, but to help develop it and to make it still more adapted to the specific national conditions in this country. In my article entitled, "Marxism-Leninism in a Changing World" (beginning in September 1956 Political Affairs), I have made a comprehensive survey of the role of Marxism-Leninism in this general period, with special stress upon its tasks and developmental needs, both on a national and international scale. To stand true to our Marxist-Leninist principles is the first indispensability in re-strengthening our Party.

PARTY AND VANGUARD ROLE

Progress demands imperatively, too, that we definitely retain the Party form of organization—and not upon a vacillating "for the time being" basis. A Party is incomparably the better form of organization for carrying on political struggle among the masses. Especially we must hold to our election and legislative activities. It is nonsense to say that there is no room for a Communist Party in a country like ours with a two-party system. The reverse has been fully dem-

onstrated by the experience of the British Communist Party, with its broad mass following.

To transform ourselves into a so-called political action association, as Comrades Gates, Norman, and others are advocating, would be a disaster for American Communism. Such a flabby and shapeless organization could not improve our legal position, strengthen our contacts with the masses, or itself take on a mass character. At most, it could only be an ineffective, semi-Social-Democratic propaganda body. To give up our Party for such a nondescript organization would be a long leap backward, an impermissible surrender to arrogant American imperialism.

Imperative, too, for our Party's well-being and growth is that it develop a perspective of sharp struggle for the oncoming period. In a world where Socialism is rising and capitalism dying, and where the monopolists are fighting to preserve their system, inevitably big struggles will lie ahead. This is especially why the working class must have a fighting Communist Party. In the United States the workers must orientate upon a perspective of an increasing struggle with the force of monopoly capital, and internationally the workers and their allies will also be able to maintain and develop peaceful co-existence among the various powers only at the price of ceaseless vigilance and powerful pressure for peace. The current industrial boom is wearing towards its end. We must beware of the class peace, class collaborationist ideas that underlie the present movement to castrate Marxism-Leninism and the Communist Party in the United States. The C.P.U.S.A., in harmony with the deepening of the general crisis of capitalism must have a class struggle perspective.

By the same token, the Party must also retain and develop its vanguard role. During its four decades of life the C.P. in this country has indisputably scored many important successes—in strikes and unemployment movements, in defense of Negro rights, in the struggle against fascism and war, and in various other fields of class conflict—and in every instance its policies most definitely have borne a vanguard character. A similar need and opportunity still confronts the Party. Actually, on every front of the class struggle, whether it is in the fight to unionize the workers, to combat jimcrowism and white chauvinism, to lay the basis for a great labor-farmer party, to cultivate a Socialist ideology among the workers, or

to carry out any others of countless tasks, the doorway is wide open for the characteristic Communist vanguard initiative, tirelessness, and organizing ability. Those who see no further vanguard role in our Party see ahead of the workers little or no class struggle in general upon either the national or international scale. About all they contemplate for Communists to do is to make abstract propaganda for Socialism. Tenden-



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cies to drop the Party's vanguard role are tendencies to tail along after the conservative mass leaders. A Communist Party without a vanguard role would amount to nothing politically.

Of course, in the vital matter of the vanguard role, as in other spheres of work, sectarian errors must be guarded against. For one thing, the Party must develop more cooperative relations with other Left elements that are genuinely working for Socialism. Eventually, when possible, it should merge with such groups, essentially upon a Marxist-Leninist basis. In this general respect, however, those comrades are doing a great disservice to the Communist Party who are creating the impression that a new, broad party of Socialism is a possibility of the near future. They have tended seriously to liquidate our Party by denying its future.

To improve our Party's democracy and to fight against bureaucratic tendencies in the organization is obviously also of basic importance in re-building our Party. This is one of the central lessons taught by the shocking Stalin revelations, and it is also one to which our membership is very much awake. Many good clauses in this general respect have been incorporated in the Draft Constitution now before the Party, which I voted for, with reservations against certain seriously wrong formulations regarding Marxism-Leninism.

CRITICISM AND SELF- CRITICISM

To strengthen its application of the basic Leninist principle of self-criticism is another major improvement the Party must make. But in this matter, during the past months, we have made some ghastly mistakes. We have not only criticized the real errors that were made during the cold-war years, and they were many and real; but we have also greatly exaggerated these shortcomings, while largely ignoring the Party's achievements. There has been a sort of competition as to who could point out the most errors, including many imaginary ones. This has been pushed to the extreme of almost completely discrediting the Party, its past policy, its basic theory, and its leadership. In fact, with such excesses we

have made a laughing stock of ourselves in the labor movement. The general result has been to pessimize and demoralize many Party members and to make them ready even for such a desperate and futile "remedy" as a political action association.

We have also been one-sided in our self-criticism in that we have concentrated all our attack upon Left-sectarianism and paid no attention whatever to the growing Right tendency, except to shield it from attack. With the result that the latter has a free hand in the Party, confusing the members and our political line, until now it is threatening the very existence of the Party, with its proposals for a political action association. Of course, we must fight Left-sectarianism as our main, traditional weakness, but we must also fight the Right danger, or we will suffer disaster.

Among the various major improvements necessary in our Party work—graphically taught also by the great debate over the Stalin cult of the individual—is a more critical attitude towards other Communist parties and towards the countries of Socialism. Everybody recognizes that in the past our policy in this matter, based upon a distorted desire for international solidarity, was incorrect. There has been too much blind following the leader. But the new criticism must not be pushed to the extent of nihilism or anti-Sovietism, as some comrades seem to want us to do. The events of the past weeks—the serious crisis, over the Suez Canal and the projected capitalist coup in Eastern Europe—should be flaming warnings to us of the continuing need for international Communist solidarity. In these days of unsettled world relationships there is need for greater Communist unity, not less. And this is precisely what the new fraternal criticism and discussion in world Communist ranks must lead to, although upon a more democratic basis. At the same time, we must be alert to combat incipient bourgeois chauvinist tendencies in our Party, of which there are now all too many.

INITIATIVE ON THEORY

Vitality important, too, in this general respect is it for our Party to display more initiative than in the past in tackling new theoretical problems. This, also, is one of the basic lessons emerging from the worldwide debate over Stalinism. Failure in this basic respect has been one of our Party's major weaknesses, including also my own. May I here, however, say a few words in personal defense against those comrades who, boasting of their own "total Marxist creativeness" (which consists mainly in liquidating the Communist Party organizationally and theoretically) consider as "moving backward" all those who reject their opportunist program.

In the several months prior to the 20th Congress of the C. P. S.U. in February, 1956, I wrote three articles of a theoretical character in Political Affairs. One of them, entitled "Has World Capitalism Become Stabilized?" developed pioneer analysis that the capitalist world, following World War II, had not succeeded in stabilizing itself, neither partially nor temporarily, neither economically nor politi-

cally. A second article entitled, "The Advance of Socialism to World Leadership," outlined at length the elementary fact that, in the world competition between the Socialist and capitalist systems, Socialism in many respects had already "overtaken and surpassed" capitalism. The third article, under the caption, "The Road to Socialism," was an up-to-date restatement of my 1949 pamphlet on this question.

I hastened the preparation of these articles so as to get them "under the wire" before the holding of the 20th Congress, precisely in order that our Party could display some political initiative and not have to tail along after the Congress on these important theoretical matters. It so happened that, in the main, the conclusions arrived at in my three articles dovetailed with those of the 20th Congress. Of course, all this effort of mine does not measure up to the grandiloquent concept of "total Marxist creativeness" of Comrade Norman, but certainly it does not qualify as "moving backward." Nor so classified can be my article in the November Political Affairs entitled, "Karl Marx and Mass Impoverishment," which challenges head-on the generations-long harmful sectarian interpretation of Marx's basic law of the absolute impoverishment of the working class.

In this general respect, let me also inject another personal remark. I wish to dissociate myself completely from the opportunistic distortion of the "peaceful" road to Socialism in this country which is now being propagated widely in our Party and which is sometimes attributed to me. In my 1949 pamphlet on the subject—*In Defense of the Communist Party and the Indicted Leaders*—I definitely developed the thesis (which was also substantially sustained by the 20th Congress) that in the U. S. the path to Socialism is bound to be one of hard struggle, with the monopolists trying to use every violence against the advancing workers, and with the latter striving to restrain and defeat this violence, so that they can hold intact the national democratic processes in order to achieve Socialism along parliamentary lines. My conclusion was, (and I still stick to it) that our Party should orientate upon the "possibility" of achieving a "relatively peaceful" advance to Socialism. We must have a struggle perspective in this matter, not an outlook of class peace and class collaboration.

MARXIST-LENINIST BASIS FOR PARTY

Obviously the CPUSA is now in a serious internal crisis, both in membership strength and in ideology. This crisis has developed from a number of major factors, including the long-range effects of "prosperity" illusions among the masses; the bitter attack upon the Party by the government during the war crisis of the cold war years; the demoralizing effects of the Stalin situation, especially the tragedy in Hungary; various serious Left mistakes made by the Party, and the growth of a strong Right tendency which is exerting serious liquidatory effects upon the Party, both organizationally and theoretically.

The foregoing points are some of the major steps, together with the development of a strong program of practical work in every field, that should be taken to save our Party, to unite it, and to put it again on the way to growth and mass influence. This can and will be done. The Gates plan to liquidate the Party into a so-called political action organization is the very heart of the threat against the Party and its ideology. To defeat this ill-advised plan and to restart building our organization upon the basis of a Marxist-Leninist Communist Party must be made the center of the present Party discussion and of the coming CP national convention.

